

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### **CATALOGUING THE CORRESPONDENCE OF SIR JAMES EDWARD SMITH MD, FRS (1759-1828) FOUNDER OF THE LINNEAN SOCIETY**

Sir James Edward Smith MD FRS, PLS (1759-1828), physician, naturalist, collector, and author of many botanical publications, founded the Linnean Society of London for the cultivation of the science of natural history and was its first President. A contemporary of Sir Joseph Banks and other of 18th century naturalists, Smith was a prolific writer, doing much to further knowledge of plants and their useful properties and to popularise botany in Britain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Smith maintained a network of over 400 correspondents and a collection of ca. 3400 letters was presented to the Linnean Society of London by Smith's widow, Pleasance. The only listing of these letters is the out of print *Catalogue of the manuscripts in the library of the Linnean Society of London: Part I, the Smith papers* by Warren R. Dawson, 114 pp. London: Linnean Society, 1934. This has brief summaries of contents for each letter, focusing largely on botanical matters and is the only available source for scholars. Physical access is limited to those who can visit the Linnean Society. Since publication of Dawson's catalogue, additional Smith correspondence comprising ca. 400 items has been identified in the Linnean Society.

The Smithian Correspondence is currently housed in the Society's premises in a purpose-built, air-conditioned room created for the Smithian Herbarium, which has strong links with the correspondence collection. The collection is managed by the Society's Librarian, Mrs Lynda Brooks. Work on the collection will be undertaken in the Society's Rooms. The building is on four floors and there is no passenger lift. A book lift is available for transfer of manuscripts between floors.

The letters were bound by Lady Smith before their presentation to the Society, with the quarto volumes forming two sequences, series I (Volumes 1-19) being letters published by Lady Smith in her 1832 *Memoir* and presented in 1857, and series II (Volumes 20-26 ) being letters found later and presented in 1872. Some volumes contain largely the letters from one correspondent.

The Smithian Correspondence has no electronic catalogue, and scholarly access is complex because letters from the same correspondent are bound in different volumes and loose unbound letters may provide an additional source, all needing to be retrieved to present a full picture.

The first step towards providing access to these letters, is to build a full electronic archival catalogue by acquiring available information from the out of print 1934 Catalogue prepared by Dawson and adding information on fuller contents from the letters themselves, as well as from more detailed listings in typescript available for some individual correspondents.

Links to other resources, such as the biographical and biological content already available in databases created for the Linnaean and Smithian biological collections, will provide access to additional information content and enhance the catalogue.

A spreadsheet is currently being created to summarise the outline content of the Dawson catalogue and to provide accurate data on the number of bound letters, their size and the inclusion of other material (such as dried plants). It will provide documentation for a conservation survey to be done at the beginning of the project.

An Archivist with cataloguing experience is needed to undertake the cataloguing two days per week over a 9 month period. The cataloguing will be done using CALM for Archives software. Records will be created which will identify and explain the content and context of the collection in order to promote its accessibility. The addition of authority records and metadata will facilitate web access to the catalogue itself and eventually to digitised images of the letters.

A research associate, with specialist knowledge of the period and subject, and with knowledge of IT systems, will be employed concurrently for the last 4 months of the project to add the links to existing Linnean Society databases and external collections.